

Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force / Law and Justice Council
SPECIAL MEETING

Justice Project Implementation Planning

Workshop #4: Jail and Accessory Facilities
Meeting Summary for Thursday, March 30, 2023

To view video recording, click on the link in the section heading.

1. [Call to Order](#)

Barry Buchanan, Councilmember and Chair of the Justice Project Planning Team, called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. and welcomed all participants. The meeting was held via remote-only Zoom Webinar and in person at the Whatcom County Council Conference Room, 311 Grand Ave., Suite 105, Bellingham, Washington.

Members Present: Jack Hovenier (Co-chair), Stephen Gockley (Co-chair), Barry Buchanan, Arlene Feld, Heather Flaherty, Darlene Peterson, Scott Korthuis, Maialisa Vanyo, Mike Hilley, Deborah Hawley, Satpal Sidhu, Dave Reynolds, Daniel Hammill, Eric Richey, Rebecca Mertzig, Perry Mowery

Additional Participants: Tyler Schroeder, Kayla Schott-Bressler, Brian Heinrich, Michael Lilliquist, Wendy Jones, Malora Christensen, Doug Chadwick, Caleb Erickson, Peter Frazier, Rusty Noble, Rob Ney, Chris Kobdich, Erika Lautenbach, Jake Wiebusch, Mike Parker, Lacey McCarley, Dean Wight

Members Absent: Eric Petersen, Bill Elfo, Greg Winter, Jenn Lockwood, Jason McGill, Seth Fleetwood, Raylene King, Donnell Tanksley, Bruce Van Glubt, David Freeman

Council Staff: Cathy Halka, Jill Nixon, and Dana Brown-Davis, Whatcom County.

Facilitators: Holly O'Neil and Mardi Solomon, Crossroads Consulting

People who are not IPRTF members introduced themselves.

Jack Hovenier offered a **Land Acknowledgement:** Before we begin, we acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Lummi, Nooksack, Samish and Semiahmoo People who have cared for and tended this land since time immemorial. Truth and acknowledgment are critical to building mutual respect and connection across all barriers of heritage and difference. We begin this effort to acknowledge what has been buried by honoring the truth. We pay respect to their elders past and present. Please take a moment to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us together here today. And please join us in uncovering such truths at any and all public events.

2. [Overview of Implementation Planning Process \(00:03:25\)](#)

Holly O'Neil reviewed the meeting agenda and process. She noted that public comments are welcome at any time by emailing: IPRTaskForce@co.whatcom.wa.us.

The focus of this meeting is on the jail and accessory services. The next workshop will focus on funding. Note that the date for the funding workshop is now Wednesday, April 12, 1:00-3:30.

The scope of work of this implementation planning process is to identify 8-10 projects to advance the recommendations from the [Justice Project Needs Assessment](#) over the next 1-3 years. The process for developing the Implementation Plan involves compiling content from worksheets and workshops, gathering additional information, and refining and synthesizing implementation plan ideas. The next step will be to poll participants from all workshops about possible implementation projects. The poll will be sent on Mon. April 3 and responses are due on Thurs. April 6 at noon.

Gathering public input will begin later in April with focus groups followed by a Town Hall. The plan will be revised and refined based on this input and then final priorities for action will be presented to County Council.

[3. Worksheet Input on a New Jail \(Need C1, Recommendations 1-3\) \(00:11:29\)](#)

Mardi Solomon reminded the group of the criteria for a jail that were established by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) and included in Need C1 in the Needs Assessment report. Recommendation 1 is to include as many of these criteria as possible in a new jail. Mardi reviewed worksheet responses related to Rec 1.

Recommendation 2 is to “Calculate comparative cost estimates for possible facility locations before a specific site is chosen.” The county is in the process of hiring a construction cost estimator to provide comparative cost estimates referring to the input from these workshops. Their work is expected to take about three weeks, so their estimates can be included in the implementation plan that goes to Council. No further discussion of Rec 2 will be needed today. The focus will be on jail capacity and location.

Recommendation 3 is “Select a location for the jail with due consideration of the comparative importance assigned to proximity to various resources and services.” Mardi reviewed the SAC’s list of resource and services that should be near the jail, as well as input from the worksheets regarding Rec 3. Bringing services to the jail rather than transporting incarcerated individuals to services was a theme. A major topic for discussion is to figure out what services and facilities are needed and where each should be located.

[4. Some Lessons from the Nashville Trip \(00:21:01\)](#)

A group of 11 people from Whatcom County toured correctional facilities in Nashville. Barry Buchanan described some features of the facilities and lessons the group took from their trip. The trauma-informed design of the Behavioral Care Center in Nashville was particularly appealing. The group would like to see these design elements (e.g., natural light, color, texture, natural elements) used throughout all parts of a new jail so that the environment is one that promotes mental health.

A feature of the Nashville Downtown Detention Center that was noted was an open booking area where people could be spend some time using the free phones and trying to post bail. This reduced the number of people spending time in the jail.

In Nashville, most jail housing is located ~20 minutes from the courthouse so people are transported to a special holding area in the courthouse for pretrial meetings and court appearances. Determining what services and resources we need to have in the civic center and what functions could be housed elsewhere is an important question.

Nashville also has a behavioral health (BH) campus located ~15 minutes from downtown that is run by a mental health co-op. It includes a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center, a Crisis Stabilization Center, and a pharmacy. Having one agency (the mental health co-op) run all the BH services is very different from our system with a lot of small agencies each providing specific types of services.

Nashville has three campuses each about 15-20 minute’s drive from the others. We have a similar

situation with the three county locations – Civic Center, Irongate, and LaBounty. We could explore which facilities should be at which location instead of thinking we need to choose one.

[5. Jail Design “Wish List” \(00:39:05\)](#)

Caleb Erickson presented a list of components that are important to have in a correctional facility that he compiled with input from corrections officers, medical and mental health professionals, and others. The list incorporates best practices from across the country. He emphasized that a very important criterion, regardless of the size of the jail, is to use trauma-informed design standards in all corrections environments so the space does not negatively affect people’s mental health. Having medical and BH services integrated into every space, areas for programming and services, and individual cells so people have a place to call their own, were other key points. Caleb also reiterated the concept of bringing services to the people who need them rather than the other way around.

[6. Estimating Jail Capacity \(00:46:34\)](#)

Tyler Schroeder presented information from the National Institute of Corrections’ Jail Capacity Planning Guide about factors that go into estimating jail capacity over a 10-20 year horizon. Given the difficulty of making reliable projections, it is best to plan in five-year increments and talk about size ranges rather than an exact number of beds. Forecasting jail capacity also involves applying adjustment factors (peaking and classification).

Tyler referred to Skagit County’s analysis for their Community Justice Center and work the JFA Institute has done to make projections for Spokane. He also presented a report done in 2013 by DLR Group to calculate jail capacity estimates for Whatcom County. The recommendation for Phase 1 was 507 beds plus 14 medical beds. Current perspective is that more medical beds would be desirable.

The current jail and Work Center have combined 359 beds. Tyler explained that the safe operating capacity of a jail is ~80% of the number of beds because of the peaking and classification adjustments that must be made.

A rich discussion followed Tyler’s presentation and included the importance of considering the drivers of incarceration, policies, and efforts to reduce incarceration, in addition to population projections, when forecasting jail capacity needs. Another factor is the changing characteristics of the jail population, which in our county has meant there are more people in the jail with mental health and substance use issues, and they are being held for more violent crimes. Booking restrictions and the length of time it takes people to get through the court process are other factors that were impacted by COVID and continue to significantly impact the jail population. A jail design that is flexible enough to respond to changes in the population is best.

[7. Facility size and location \(01:43:11\)](#)

Square footage of a jail facility will be based on the number of cells and types of services desired. With the preferred single cell design, the overall footprint of the facility would be bigger than a design with shared cells, and a horizontal facility will have a much larger footprint than a vertical one. Constructing the building in “pods” that are two-tiered blocks of cells with services integrated into each one, would enable easy expansion if needed by adding another pod. The types of services that we want to locate in the facility should be determined first and the square footage measurements will follow from that.

Some of the points about location that were raised were:

- A facility located in the Civic Center would need to have 2-4 stories underground and about 7 stories above ground.
- At Irongate the county purchased ~3.5 acres next to the Anne Deacon Center for Hope. That

would be a good place to co-locate a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center. The Work Center also could be repurposed. There are not additional properties available for purchase nearby at this time.

- LaBounty is the one county-owned property with space for a horizontal facility.
- Adequate space in the jail for programs and services is a high priority.
- A location for re-entry services to ensure a warm handoff for people who are released is key. This could be at a Resource Center.

8. Next Steps and Closing Comments (02:24:20)

Barry's closing comments summarized main points from this meeting and previous workshops: We have identified a trifecta of needs: A facility that will meet our corrections housing needs for the future; more community services for BH issues; and a resource center that emphasizes homeless outreach, re-entry, etc.

Holly reminded everyone that they will receive a poll and should complete it by noon, Thurs. April 6. The next workshop is April 12, 1:00-3:30. Additional comments can be sent to:

IPRTaskForce@co.whatcom.wa.us.

Meeting adjourned 11:57 a.m.